

MINNESOTA STATE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY



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State Fire Marshal Division

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FIRE SAFETY FOR SCHOOL EVENTS

When schools set up and decorate for special events such as proms, dances, homecoming, and graduation parties, the fire-safety features required in school buildings must not be diminished, and additional fire hazards must not be introduced.

The following requirements and safeguards from the Minnesota State Fire Code (MSFC) are to be followed when planning and executing school-related events. In addition to assuring compliance with these requirements, administrators should assign a responsible staff member to monitor fire safety conditions during events.

Contact the State Fire Marshal Division with questions regarding this information sheet. Questions may be emailed to: firecode@state.mn.us.

Maintaining the means of egress

All required exit doorways must be immediately accessible and operational. Exit doors may not be locked or otherwise rendered inoperable. The means of egress may not be obstructed, altered or diminished by the use of gates, physical barriers, decorative materials or other obstacles.

Exit doors and exit aisles

Exit doorways and aisles leading to exits must be kept free from obstructions or impediments. As a general rule, exit aisles must have the same width as the exit doorways they serve. Excessive amounts of highly combustible materials may not be placed adjacent to exit doorways.

Corridors

Decorations, props, or other items must not reduce the required minimum width of exit corridors or otherwise obstruct the means of egress.

Visibility of exits

Decorations, props, curtains, hangings, or other items must not conceal or otherwise obscure required exit doorways. Exit signs must be clearly visible and properly illuminated.

Emergency lighting

Emergency lighting units are necessary in order to maintain minimum illumination levels in the event of a power failure. Emergency lighting must not be concealed or otherwise obstructed.

Overcrowding

Although overcrowding is typically not a concern in schools, there are occasions such as during graduation ceremonies or other publicly attended events when a room or area may become overcrowded. It is unsafe and unlawful to exceed the maximum occupant load of an assembly area such as a gymnasium or auditorium. The maximum occupant load may already be posted near the main exit from the assembly room. If the maximum occupant load is not posted or known, contact your fire code official for assistance.

Combustible decorations in assembly areas and corridors

Curtains, drapes, hangings, paper sheeting, art work, and other decorative materials exceeding 20 percent of the wall or ceiling areas must be flame-resistant, per NFPA 701, or be inherently noncombustible.

Flame-resistant party and decorative materials are available at retail party stores and online retail websites. The product packaging and/or the manufacturer's documentation of flame resistance should be retained in order to demonstrate compliance.

Combustible vegetation — artificial and natural

Artificial vegetation must be flame-resistant, per NFPA 701. Limited quantities of cut, natural decorative vegetation such as hay bales, corn stalks, tree branches, etc. are permitted as long as they do not constitute a hazard as determined by the fire code official. Significant amounts of combustible vegetation are prohibited unless they are flame-resistant, per NFPA 701.

Foam plastics

Due to the burning characteristics of foam plastic material and the highly toxic vapors that are produced during combustion, the use of foam plastic is strictly regulated. When used for decorative purposes, individual prop pieces may not exceed one pound in weight. Also, foam board used to cover any decorative sets or interior surfaces is limited to 10 percent of the total surface area and may not exceed ½-inch in thickness or 8 inches in width.

These limits may be exceeded only when documentation is provided from the manufacturer showing that the foam plastic material has a maximum heat release rate of 100kW when tested in accordance with UL 1975. This type of foam plastic is designed specifically for decorative use. It's important to note that the typical foam plastic insulation board available at most home centers will not comply with the 100kW heat-release rate.

Open flame (candles, oil lamps, etc.)

The use of open-flame devices such as candles, oil lamps, or similar decorative burning devices during an event or gathering is prohibited without written approval from the fire code official. The use of an open flame associated with a theatrical performance or demonstration is also prohibited without prior written approval.

Fireworks and pyrotechnic displays

Both indoor and outdoor fireworks/pyrotechnic displays are prohibited without a special permit, and such displays must be supervised by a fireworks operator certified by the State Fire Marshal. For more information on fireworks and pyrotechnic displays, contact the State Fire Marshal Division.

Fire sprinkler heads

Decorative items must be located so as not to interfere with the proper functioning or discharge pattern of fire sprinkler heads. As a general rule, decorative items suspended from ceilings must be located at least 18-inches below the level of the fire sprinkler heads. Special care must be taken to ensure that side-wall sprinkler heads (those heads installed on an upper wall surface designed to spray water horizontally across the room and ceiling) are not obstructed by decorative items.

Fire alarm system devices

Fire alarm system detection devices such as heat or smoke detectors must not be covered or otherwise separated from the area being protected. Decorations, props, or other items must not conceal or obstruct access to manual pull stations.

Fire alarm notification appliances such as alarm horns and visual strobes must not be obstructed so as to reduce audible alarm levels or obstruct visibility of strobe lights.

Fire extinguishers

Decorations, props, or other items must not conceal or obstruct access to portable fire extinguishers.

Fire doors

The immediate area around fire-rated doors must be kept free of any items or décor that would prevent the doors from automatically closing and latching.

Extension cords

Extension cords may be used to provide limited, temporary power for special events. However, extension cords -

- Must be UL listed and properly rated for the power load they are supplying
- Must not be extended through walls, ceilings, doors, under floor coverings, or otherwise exposed to mechanical damage
- Must be grounded when serving grounded appliances
- Must be in good condition, without splices or damage
- Must not be located along walking areas or within the path of egress where they can pose a tripping hazard

The use of relocatable power taps equipped with 15-amp over-current protection is recommended in order to help prevent the overloading of electrical circuits.

Party/Holiday Lighting

Party and holiday lighting strings and fixtures must be UL listed and used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. The instructions will indicate the maximum number of lighting sections that can be connected together.